Report on Accreditation Study Work Group Meetings

Professional Services Division
October 12

Background and Overview
The Accreditation Study Work Group (work group) has met a total of three times to date, and will have met an additional time prior to the October meeting of the Committee on Accreditation (COA).   In planning the meetings, one primary objective has been to ensure that all work group members have a solid understanding of the current accreditation system prior to any attempt at consensus building. To that end, the general approach to agenda development for these meetings has included the introduction of topics and issues with relevant reading materials or documents that are informational in nature. This foundational discussion on a topic is then followed at a subsequent meeting with more in-depth conversation with the hope that the group can move toward consensus and, perhaps, the development of some preliminary recommendations.

At its meeting in August, the COA heard oral reports about the first two meetings of the work group from COA members serving on the work group. As discussed, the first meeting in June of the work group was largely organizational in nature, addressing issues such as meeting dates, group norms, the charge to the group, and general identification of issues and topics that will need to be discussed. The second meeting of the Accreditation Study Work Group was held on August 17 and 18, 2004. The major discussion topics for this meeting included: (1) the purpose of Accreditation, including accreditation in other professions; (2) the role of CTC and COA as defined in education code, the current *Accreditation Framework*, and in implementation; and (3) the relationship between national accreditation, NCATE, and the current accreditation system.

The work group's third meeting was held on September 22-23, 2004. At that time, the work group continued its discussion on the purpose of accreditation and national accreditation. In addition, work group members also discussed new topics including credential programs that are approved by the Commission but not currently incorporated in the accreditation process, such as subject matter programs, blended programs, the 5th year option, and professional teacher induction programs. In addition, the work group discussed how the accreditation process might better encourage program improvement, and in particular discussed the possibility of interim accreditation activities (between site visits). The work group also began its discussion around uses of data which will be continued with greater focus at the work group meeting on October 20th.

Background materials for the group prepared by staff and members of the work group for these meetings are numerous and are available on the Commission's website. Some of the resources provided are documents and materials either familiar to members of the COA or presented at some time in the past, while others are entirely new.   Although the

materials used throughout the review process will vary depending on the topic to be discussed, one of the tools that staff has agreed to provide to assist both COA and the work group is intended to facilitate an understanding of the commonalities and differences between what is contained in the California Education Code and accreditation policy as defined by the *Accreditation Framework* for each major topic area. To accomplish this, staff identified pertinent sections of the current *Accreditation Framework* identifying the language that was taken directly from the Education Code (by italicizing the appropriate clauses, phrases or sentences). Such a tool will hopefully help communicate the level of change required by each possible option or alternative discussed (statutory change, Commission policy change, or implementation/COA process change). Another example of an important resource includes the report from the American Institutes for Research (AIR) which contains numerous findings and recommendations related to the accreditation system. To facilitate the use of this report during the discussions, staff is preparing an index by topic addressed, identifying the pages and findings or recommendations related to these topics.

a.   COA Members Report on work group meetings
The four COA members serving on the Accreditation Study Work Group will report orally on the progress of the work group's deliberations.

b.   Documentation of Options and Alternatives: Topics, Options, and Implications Matrix
In providing an update about the progress of the work group and COA's deliberations on the accreditation review to the Commission's Senior Managers, it became very clear that there is a need to document carefully the numerous options and alternatives that are being considered on the wide variety of issues that fall under the umbrella of accreditation. One critical reason for such a concern is that the Commission currently has seven vacancies and several more are expected in the coming months. It is likely that the Governor will appoint new Commissioners to fill these vacancies and these new Commissioners, in particular, but even those Commissioners who continue their terms, will need to be informed about the various issues discussed, the options that have been discussed and debated, and the potential implications of the proposed changes. In addition, there is a need to ensure that those in the Administration, the legislature, other agencies, members of the public, and those in the education community understand the scope of the review, that the rationale for the recommendations from the workgroup and from the COA are clear and that there is assurance that many options and alternatives were given fair consideration.

To address this need, staff has developed two matrices that will be used and revised as the process moves forward. The first is a brief explanation of the accreditation related issues to be addressed with a listing of the potential options or alternatives that have been identified to address the issue. The second matrix is more detailed in that it includes an identification of the topics that are being addressed, the options that have been considered to date, the policy implications of those options, the budget and cost implications, the impact of those changes (such as to the profession, to student learning, etc.), the level of change required (such as to statute, the Framework, or implementation and process), and

finally, the work group recommendation. Ultimately, the COA's recommendation will also be added as well.

c.   Stakeholder Feedback
The members of the work group have actively sought constituency feedback on accreditation issues being addressed. During the work group meetings, members have identified topics that they feel required additional feedback, either staff or work group members drafted language for the questions that would be commonly asked, and each work group member has assumed responsibility for sending the survey to their constituency and summarizing the comments once received. To date, the feedback has been used to gather general information on a variety of critical accreditation issues and to help focus of the conversation about these various issues. To date, the questions posed have been intentionally open-ended so as not to direct responses in any way. The survey responses are shared with the work group members and the feedback received is incorporated into the conversation.

Concern about the length of the latest survey has sparked a conversation about altering the manner in which the surveys are constructed from this point in the process forward. More directed questions with checkbox-type answers could serve to both improve the number of responses, quicken the time it takes for the individual to respond, and make summary and analysis of this additional data an easier task. In addition, the group may discuss ways in which broader feedback and wider distribution of the surveys could be implemented. These issues will be discussed further by the work group at its meeting in October. Regardless, gathering and using stakeholder feedback each step is an important component of this review process.

d.   COA Communication with Accreditation Study Work Group
The Committee on Accreditation is scheduled to meet next in January 2005 and March 2005. During this same period of time, the Accreditation Study Work Group is scheduled to meet four more times: in November 2004, January 2005, February 2005, and March 2005. In order to keep the process moving such that recommendations about the *Framework* can be brought to the Commission in a manner consistent with the plan and schedule adopted by the Commission, it is necessary that the Committee on Accreditation discuss strategies it might employ to ensure appropriate level of direction and comment to the work group. It is important to note that the Work Group is expected to submit its recommendations to the COA for consideration at the March 2005 meeting of the COA, and the COA will then determine what to recommend to the Commission.